Studying Language of Immediacy and Language of Distance from a Corpus Linguistic Perspective: A Pilot Study of Evaluation Markers in French Television Weather Reports

Authors : Vince Liégeois

Abstract : Language of immediacy and distance: Within their discourse theory, Koch & Oesterreicher establish a distinction between a language of immediacy and a language of distance. The former refers to those discourses which are oriented more towards a spoken norm, whereas the latter entails discourses oriented towards a written norm, regardless of whether they are realised phonically or graphically. This means that an utterance can be realised phonically but oriented more towards the written language norm (e.g., a scientific presentation or eulogy) or realised graphically but oriented towards a spoken norm (e.g., a scribble or chat messages). Research desiderata: The methodological approach from Koch & Oesterreicher has often been criticised for not providing a corpus-linguistic methodology, which makes it difficult to work with quantitative data or address large text collections within this research paradigm. Consequently, the Koch & Oesterreicher approach has difficulties gaining ground in those research areas which rely more on corpus linguistic research models, like text linguistics and LSP-research. A combinatory approach: Accordingly, we want to establish a combinatory approach with corpus-based linguistic methodology. To this end, we propose to (i) include data about the context of an utterance (e.g., monologicity/dialogicity, familiarity with the speaker) – which were called "conditions of communication" in the original work of Koch & Oesterreicher – and (ii) correlate the linguistic phenomenon at the centre of the inquiry (e.g., evaluation markers) to a group of linguistic phenomena deemed typical for either distance- or immediacy-language. Based on these two parameters, linguistic phenomena and texts could then be mapped on an immediacy-distance continuum. Pilot study: To illustrate the benefits of this approach, we will conduct a pilot study on evaluation phenomena in French television weather reports, a form of domain-sensitive discourse which has often been cited as an example of a "text genre". Within this text genre, we will look at so-called "evaluation markers," e.g., fixed strings like bad weather, stifling hot, and "no luck today!". These evaluation markers help to communicate the coming weather situation towards the lay audience but have not yet been studied within the Koch & Oesterreicher research paradigm. Accordingly, we want to figure out whether said evaluation markers are more typical for those weather reports which tend more towards immediacy or those which tend more towards distance. To this aim, we collected a corpus with different kinds of television weather reports,e.g., as part of the news broadcast, including dialogue. The evaluation markers themselves will be studied according to the explained methodology, by correlating them to (i) metadata about the context and (ii) linguistic phenomena characterising immediacy-language: repetition, deixis (personal, spatial, and temporal), a freer choice of tense and right- /left-dislocation. Results: Our results indicate that evaluation markers are more dominantly present in those weather reports inclining towards immediacy-language. Based on the methodology established above, we have gained more insight into the working of evaluation markers in the domain-sensitive text genre of (television) weather reports. For future research, it will be interesting to determine whether said evaluation markers are also typical for immediacy-language-oriented in other domain-sensitive discourses.

Keywords : corpus-based linguistics, evaluation markers, language of immediacy and distance, weather reports

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